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Sermon on the Epistle for the Second Sunday in Advent.

ROM. 15, 4—13.¹⁾

Unity in faith and in doctrine is an absolute necessity for the growth of a Christian congregation; in fact, without it no congregation can be a truly Christian one. What a deplorable state of affairs would it be, if one member of a congregation believed this, another that in regard to clearly revealed doctrines of the Bible! There could never be any peace and harmony in such a congregation. Therefore the Scriptures in various passages admonish the Christians to be diligent in preserving this unity of faith. Thus Paul writes to the Ephesians, ch. 4: "Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And to the Romans, ch. 16, 17, he writes: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." According to these passages, it clearly is the duty of every Christian congregation to see to it that all its members are of one faith, and to exclude those from its midst who harbor false doctrines and refuse to recant them after having been admonished; or if the majority is on the wrong side, it becomes the duty of the minority to separate themselves. In order to insure, as much as possible, this unity of faith in our congregations, we Lutherans not only see to it that our pastors are well founded in the doctrine of our church and of the Bible, and that God's pure Word is preached from all our pulpits, but we also instruct the laymen who wish to join our church in its principal doctrines before accepting them as members. And there is certainly no other denomination in which you will find such a unity of faith, not only among the clergy, but also among the lay members, as in our Lutheran Church, and especially in our own Missouri Synod.

1) See Outline, HOM. MAG. II, p. 372.

But, my hearers, faith always shows itself in love. "Faith," as St. Paul says, "worketh by love." And so, where there is true unity of faith, there must also be true unity of love, there the members of a congregation must necessarily be united by the bond of true love. Wherever this true love is missing, where there is strife and contention and discord among the members of a congregation, this is a certain sign that, although with their mouths they may confess the same faith, the faith of their heart certainly is not right, that, notwithstanding their external profession, they still are no true Christians at heart.

Alas! alas! that there should be so many congregations where this bond of love is torn by the frivolous hand of strife and contention. But still, this is only too often the case. There are many congregations where, instead of peace and love and unity, there is nothing but continual strife and discord. No wonder that the wicked world points its fingers at such congregations and ridicules the religion of love, which cannot even teach love to its own disciples.

Alas, that it should be thus! But it has been thus ever since the days of the apostles. Even they were obliged to admonish their congregations to desist from contention and strife. Also in our epistle lesson we find such an exhortation to unity and harmony. Now as this apostolic exhortation certainly is not amiss in our case either, let us now endeavor to learn from it

THE REASON WHY MEMBERS OF A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION SHOULD ENDEAVOR TO RETAIN THE UNITY OF LOVE AMONG THEMSELVES.

1. *The first reason is the example of Christ.*
2. *The second reason is the one salvation which they all have obtained.*

1.

The first reason why Christians should always endeavor to retain the unity of true love among themselves is the example which Christ Himself has left us. This we learn from the beginning of our text. There St. Paul says that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." But what are "the things written aforetime" to which the apostle has reference here? To understand this, we must refer to v. 3: "For even Christ pleased not Himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell upon me." This, then, is the example which Christ has left us, that during His life upon this earth He did not try to please Himself, did not seek His own profit and welfare, but served others, in fact, bore calumny, pain, and death without resentment, and all this for the sake of others, for the purpose of redeeming the sinful world. And as Christ bore all this for our sake, so, the apostle says

(vv. 1. 2), we Christians, too, ought for His sake to bear the faults of our neighbors. "They that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please themselves." And everyone of us should please his neighbor "for his good to edification." In thus following the example of Christ, in bearing each other's weaknesses and faults, in waiving our rights at times and not always insisting upon them, true peace and harmony, true unity of love will invariably be preserved among us. O my dear hearers, let us therefore keep this example of our Lord and Savior always before our eyes! Let us learn from Him to bear with one another's faults and frailties. For we all have our weaknesses; others always have to bear with us. Let us, therefore, endeavor to bear with them, too. And above all, let us pray to our heavenly Father to give us a kind and forgiving heart that is ready to forgive and forget our neighbor's fault, even though he sin against us seventy times seven times every day, according to Christ's word to Peter.

The apostle furthermore shows what this unity of love should consist in, which we are to learn from the example of Christ. He proceeds: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." In the first place, then, Christians should be likeminded toward one another. They must be of the same mind; there must be harmony of opinion among them as much as possible. That is the foundation of all outward unity and harmony, that in their hearts they be united by true love. If that is not the case, if in their outward intercourse they are seemingly on a friendly footing with one another, but inwardly they are estranged, their friendship is but sham, and consequently cannot be pleasing to God, nor is it possible that it should be lasting. And in order to incite them to such likemindedness, Paul puts before them the example of God Himself, by calling Him the "God of patience and consolation." God is indeed the God of patience. He has much patience with sinful mankind. Ah, if He were not such a longsuffering God, He would long ago have destroyed this world for the wickedness with which its inhabitants persistently grieve and offend Him. But oh! what patience does He exercise over against all our thousand faults and shortcomings! And He is also the God of consolation; in all our trials and troubles He has provided for us true consolation in His heavenly Word. Ah, ought not this to incite us to exercise patience towards our brethren, to be ever ready to forgive their manifold shortcomings with which they grieve us, and to administer comfort to them, both in words and deeds, whenever and wherever we see them in trouble and affliction? Surely, if we do this, then the spirit of true love and unity will be fostered and preserved among us.—Yet one thing the apostle indicates in this connection: he prays that the Christians may be like-

mind according to Jesus Christ, or according to the example of Christ Jesus, thus once more reminding them of the example of love and self-denial which their Savior has left for them to imitate.

But true inward likemindedness must also show itself outwardly, and of course, the mouth will be the first thing that gives evidence of it. For "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Therefore St. Paul proceeds: "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Christians should glorify God with their whole life; everything they do they are to do for the glory of God. And they must not neglect to praise and glorify Him with their mouth either. And Paul here admonishes them to glorify Him with one mind and mouth. Where Christians harbor hatred and discord among themselves, where with their mouth they quarrel with each other and with the same mouth try to praise and glorify God, there all their prayers and songs of thanksgiving will be an abomination to God, for He is a God of love and peace, and He wants His Christians to love each other and to praise Him with one mind and mouth, as Paul here says. About this St. James says very pertinently in his epistle: "With the tongue bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we man, made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

Finally, inward love and likemindedness will also show itself in acts of love, in a life of charity. This the apostle says in the last place by the words: "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." We should receive one another in love, should be kind and benevolent and charitable to all, should not neglect one another, but treat all with equal love, because Christ has also received us. Though we were sinners, yea, though we were His enemies, He received us all as His brethren, when He became a man like ourselves, for the purpose of redeeming us and finally uniting us forever with Himself in heaven. And another reason why we should receive one another, is, as St. Paul says, because it redounds to the glory of God. If Christians quarrel among themselves, or if, at any rate, they show little love and friendship for each other, their religion will be held responsible for it, God's name will be reviled, while, on the contrary, God's name will be glorified, if the world sees that Christians truly love each other and show their love by deeds of charity.

2.

Secondly, the Christians should be incited to exercise true love among themselves by the fact that they all have received one and the same salvation. In the congregation at Rome to which the apostle wrote this letter there were two classes of Christians, *viz.*, those who formerly had been Jews, and those who had been converted

to Christ from heathendom. And this gave rise to many unpleasant scenes. The Jews, who were proud of their ancestry, of having descended from the chosen people of God in the old dispensation, were prone to look down upon those with scorn and contempt who did not enjoy this prerogative, whereas the Christians out of heathendom were inclined to resent this and perhaps to taunt the Jews, because their people had finally been rejected by God for their wickedness and dispersed into all the world.

These two factions in the congregation at Rome Paul now tried to reconcile. He therefore says v. 8: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." Jesus Christ, he says, was a minister of the circumcision. By circumcision he means not that ceremony which in the Old Testament God had enjoined upon Abraham and his seed as a sign of the covenant between them and God, but he means the Jewish people themselves to whom God had entrusted this sacrament, because it was the sign by which the Jews were distinguished from all other nations, just as in Gal. 2, 7. 8 he calls the heathen uncircumcision and the Jews the circumcision. Now, then, Christ was the minister of the Jews, *i. e.*, He was, during His sojourn on earth, to minister to the spiritual wants of that people. He was to preach the Gospel to them and once more try to lead them to repentance. For He Himself says that He was "not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And Christ was a minister of the circumcision "to confirm the promises made to the fathers." God had, on various occasions and in many different places promised the Jewish people in the Old Testament that the Messiah should descend from their race, that He should be their Messiah and Savior. And to confirm these promises made to the fathers, to fulfill them and thus prove the truth of God's Word, Christ, in the first place, was the minister of the circumcision.

But Christ was not only the Savior of the Jews, nay, He was to redeem the whole sinful world, He was to save both Jews and Gentiles. His salvation was to belong to the heathen as well. Therefore the apostle proceeds: "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." The heathen had not received such direct promises and prophecies as the Jews. But still God's infinite mercy included them also in the plan of redemption. Christ was to be their Savior also, and they, too, were to be converted to Him and then to praise and glorify God together with the converts from the circumcision. And this the apostle proves with passages from the Old Testament. "As it is written: For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name." This passage is taken from Ps. 8, and introduces Christ as saying that He would praise God among the Gentiles. This, of course, implies that He will be present

among the heathen, that they will be converted to Him. "And again he saith: Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people." This passage from Deuteronomy says plainly that the heathen, together with God's chosen people, the Jews, should praise God. "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust." Here the prophet says that the Root of Jesse, *i. e.*, Christ, shall reign among the Gentiles, and that the Gentiles shall trust in Him. These passages clearly show that Christ was to be not only the Savior of Jews, but also of the heathen, that both of them had in Christ received the same salvation.

Thus does Paul exhort the Christians from among the Jews and those from among the Gentiles in the congregation at Rome to lay aside their factional prejudice and to live in peace and harmony, because, after all, they had the same Savior and the same salvation. And this same reason ought to induce us, my hearers, to foster love and unity among ourselves and to guard against all strife and discord. Yes, let us remember, brethren, we all have the same Savior, who loves us all with the same everlasting love, who has redeemed us all for the same heaven with His holy, precious blood. Should that not incite us to love one another? Surely, if this cannot effect it, there is nothing that can. Therefore let us, by the help of God, be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and let us receive one another, as Christ received also us, to the glory of God. Amen.

G. L.

Sermon on the Epistle for the Fourth Sunday in Advent.

PHIL. 4, 4—7.

"Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." Thus writes Paul in the first verse of the chapter from which our Epistle for to-day is taken. He tells the children of God at Philippi to stand fast in the Lord. They are his brethren, his joy, his crown, and therefore dearly beloved. It was Paul that came to them and preached salvation in Christ Jesus; it was he that brought them to the foot of Him who "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree;" and it is this same Paul now, the aged man, that exhorts them to stand fast, to remain faithful, firm, and stable in the Lord. Paul himself is a beautiful example of fidelity. How firm did he remain in God! The changes of fortune and of fame did not alter his course, did not make him waver from the goal he was contending for. Pains, sufferings, afflictions, yea, perils of death moved him not

from standing fast in the Lord and holding to the Rock of Ages. Ah, faithful Paul! I hold his exemplary life and conversation up to you for imitation to stand fast in the Lord.

And, my brethren, be not moved from this standing by vain dreams and emotions of your deceitful hearts, or by the enticements of a corrupt and perverse world, but abide in the Lord as the children of God. As the ivy running up an oak entwines it and sets its roots deep into the sturdy tree to remain there amidst all vicissitudes, so you, dearly beloved, are to entwine your love, your hope, your all about that everlasting Oak over which the howling blast of God's wrath swept and which it broke in twain for our sakes, but which after three days rose again and ascended on high—the precious Tree of Life. Be deeply rooted in it, and God-pleasing fruits will be the result, which you as a Christian must bring forth.

For our conversation, our citizenship, is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our conversation is not on earth, *i. e.*, not in earthly things, but in heavenly things; and we should so walk as to have this ever before us. Christians forgetting this are wretched mortals, constantly wavering between two things: eternal life and this life. At times they think of God and His behests; again it occurs to them: we are on the earth, shall we not make the best of this life? why care if everything is not exactly right? No, no! That is not standing fast in the Lord, that is not clinging to Him and resting in Him. Remember, your conversation, your citizenship, is not on earth; your home is above, not here below. Here you are a pilgrim and a stranger, journeying towards a better land. May our life, our daily walk, be consistent with this, and not be contaminated by works of wickedness. In other words, stand fast in the Lord! Doing this, you will also comprehend the meaning of our Epistle for to-day, which speaks of

THE CHRISTIANS' JOY IN THE LORD.

They are to rejoice, for

1. *He is with them;*¹⁾ 2. *He removes care;* 3. *He gives peace.*

1.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway," writes the sainted apostle. Joy is to fill their hearts. To show how certain and how earnestly he means this, he writes: "And again I say, Rejoice!" Christians are not to be downcast, gloomy, and sad, shrouded in black and mourning, but they are to be glad, not indeed in themselves or in their achievements; their gladness should not rest in anything in or about them, but in the Lord. In the Lord you are to rejoice. He is the source of a Christian's joy. Nothing is more sought by man here on earth than the things that gladden his heart and fill him with joy; it is an

1) According to Luther; see St. Louis edition, vol. 12, p. 92.

essential of all true happiness, and therefore sought with great zeal and anxiety by man. Be it said with regret that by far the largest number of people seek joy where true joy is not to be found. Paul, writing with tears in his eyes, tells the enemies of the cross of Christ that their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and their glory is in their shame. They seek glory in things shameful. With these they pride themselves and wish to be admired, which affords them joy. How sad this is, and yet an undeniable fact. Believers are to be careful not to do the same. Their source of rejoicing should be, and alone is, the Lord. Jesus says to His disciples: "Rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." That is something over which man can be truly glad, if his name is recorded in heaven, if it is written in the Book of Life; for then he shall dwell forever with the Lord.

The Lord is at hand, is near, is with the child of God.²⁾ He is with us in sorrow as sorrowful, says the apostle, yet always rejoicing. Amidst sorrow God also gives joy. Amidst the thorns of affliction the rose of comfort looks forth. While the wound is made, the balsam is near, yea, it flows from the very wound itself. The Lord is near. You are out on a bright day and you see the sun shining beautifully. You go forth on a dark, cloudy day, and you cannot see the sun; but has the sun changed? Is he not just as near as he was on a bright day? Certainly, but our eye, being clouded, cannot see him. So it is in affliction. The Lord is just as near, yea, nearer in the hour of distress to give comfort. For God is immutable. There is no change in Him. And if you believe in Him, He is with you, a fact over which you are to rejoice.

Peter, writing to the Christians of the dispersion, says: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." The Christians to whom this was addressed were persecuted and hunted down by the wicked in order to put them to death, yet in this plight and danger of losing their life every day, the apostle exhorts them to rejoice, to be glad at their sufferings, since Christ also suffered to redeem them, and now is gone to heaven to reveal His glory unto them or to come again, so that they may be with Him forever. Indeed, God is with us in all straits and conditions of life. The Lord is near, is at hand, to help us — a reason for rejoicing in the Lord.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men." The word "moderation" denotes mildness, modesty, patience, humility, gentle-

2) Luther.

ness. It is a virtue of the Christian that you do not without hesitation and forethought judge about your neighbor's words and put the most uncharitable construction on them, or that you do not deal with him harshly; but by moderation you, as a believer, are to overlook many things and are to cover by the charity the multitude of sins, and, wherever it is possible, to accede to his wishes for peace and love's sake. True moderation in Christians is a great virtue, and its absence is something to be deplored. How often are not believers guilty of passing judgment upon their fellowman, without even having ascertained whether he is guilty of the charge or not! How stubborn and stiffnecked are not some in clinging to what they said and did, not hearkening to another brother's advice! They believe *they* know it, and therefore do not care for any one else. These are the signs of a vain heart and a shallow mind, and it is a sin to be thus minded. Beloved, let us avoid these things, and show our moderation, our mildness and modesty, unto all men, not indeed by praising them unduly or boasting of them, but in our actions, in our conversation with them. "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves," writes the apostle. "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification." And, "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men." This is said to hearers as well as to preachers. Unto Titus God says: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Christians are to be gentle, meek, and mild, are to practice moderation. Do this because the Lord is near. He will soon come and not tarry to call you to account for the wrong you have done by not exercising yourself in this Christian virtue. But if you are moderate in the sense of the text, then you have good reason to joy over the nearness of your Lord, for He comes to reward you for your gentleness and humility. Hence, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice!"

2.

A second reason why Christians are to rejoice in the Lord always is given in the words: "Be careful for nothing," *i. e.*, do not care and worry about anything. The Lord careth for you. It is the work of the ungodly and wicked to care. They worry and are anxious about many things. Since they think they have no one in heaven that provides for them, they go about laden down with heavy thoughts about the future. They are ever propounding the question: What shall I eat and what shall I clothe myself with? What shall I do to get rich? How can I make money?—and a host of other useless questions are floating through the cells of their brain and go to make their life miserable. Another class of fretful people may here

be mentioned. It comprises such as worry about nothing, about things of the most trifling and trivial nature. It is their peculiarity to worry about little things; greater and more important ones do not concern them. A word spoken hastily, a misfitting garment, a tardy reply to a letter, and a thousand other insignificant things set these people aworrying to no avail.

Now, Christians are not to be thus. "Be careful for nothing;" do not worry, neither for the one, nor for the other. Here moderation is to be applied. The believer has no need of caring; for in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God! Behold, it is God that will care for you; He will provide for you amidst each and every distress. Therefore, if there is anything weighting you down with anxious thoughts, unburden yourself by calling on Him; make your requests known unto Him. Seek Him in heartfelt prayer.

Right here is a great difference between a believer and an unbeliever. The ungodly in misfortune is smitten to the ground, utterly helpless outside of his own resources. He has no one in heaven that cares for him. He is in misery, shipwrecked, stranded, helpless. As long as the days are good, he is happy; but when the evil day comes, worry, fretting, anxiety deluges his heart and follows him like the eagle his prey, driving him either into crime and vice, or into sadness and dissatisfaction with everything, while the believer has One in heaven that cares for him. He knows that nothing during life happens to him by accident, but that God overrules all. In whatsoever condition he be, God bids him seek His presence in prayer. In everything the Christian is told and invited to go to Him who is almighty and able to do everything for him, who is all-merciful, ever touched by our weakness and ever ready to hear our cry. "Call upon me," says God, "in the day of trouble; and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "Pray without ceasing!" In prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, open your heart to God, tell Him your wants as a child upon the knee of his parent, and your cares will be taken from you.

Prayer nowadays is a very much neglected privilege and duty among Christians. Many think: "I have no need of it." Others think: "God has no time for me," and so forth. Remember the divine command: "Pray without ceasing!" Prayer, true prayer, is the first thing that mothers are to teach their children. Prayer, Scriptural prayer, should follow the child into manhood, and from manhood into old age. Prayer, God-pleasing prayer, will be the stay and staff of a soul agonizing in death. O Christian, you cannot overrate this privilege! And if there be any among you that do not pray, let this be the last day of such neglect. A Christian can hardly be thought of without prayer. All godly men and women mentioned in the Scriptures were persons of prayer. They all prayed, from

Adam down to John, and at the head of them stands Christ Himself, who has taught His followers to pray. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Do this, and you cannot help but rejoice in the Lord always. It will be joy to you in the future as it has been in the past, and to all that have done this.

3.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" — another reason for rejoicing in the Lord. He gives peace. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In and through Jesus Christ this peace with God has been brought to us. By being in God's Son by faith, God no longer looks upon our shortcomings, sins, and iniquities, but solely upon Jesus, His righteousness and work, and thus the sinner is at peace with God. There is nothing between him and the Lord save the perfect obedience and expiation of Christ. From this peace with God comes the peace of conscience. Such peace is given by God. No man can subdue the pangs caused by an accusing conscience. We know how people try to do this, how they resort to the most heathenish and carnal things to drown or subdue at least the qualms and pains resulting from their evil actions; but in vain do they try, since they employ the wrong remedy.

There is but one way of having your conscience at peace, and that is by owning Christ your Savior, that He has made atonement for the sins that burden your conscience. By accepting His satisfaction you relieve yourself of the burden of guilt. Jesus, bidding His disciples farewell, says: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." That is the true peace which we have by faith. This peace "passeth all understanding," it exceeds comprehension, mind, and thoughts. The beauty, the loveliness, the excellence of such peace is not only unutterable, but also incomprehensible, because it brings with it all spiritual and heavenly gifts. In the world to come we shall fully realize what is the great meaning of such peace.

This peace will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. As a watchman guarding your house, so this peace is to protect your heart and mind. As a watch surrounding a city to keep off the enemy, so this peace will surround you, hindering the Evil One, Satan, in his mean devices. He is not able to hurt you, for God's peace is guarding your heart and mind, so that you do not waver from Christ Jesus. The wicked people, their example and their allurements, will not prevail over you, for God's peace, as the heavenly sentinel, watches over you. The enticements of our old man, our

sinful self, will not move us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, for it is the peace from on high that fills our heart, so that these may not enter.

If this peace is in your heart, in your mind and conscience, you surely must be happy. You cannot but rejoice in the Lord. Gladness must fill you to overflowing. What Christian can be sorrowing and mournful having this heavenly gift in his heart, guarding it, keeping and watching over it, until the day of deliverance? Amidst a chilly, untoward world, where grievances abound and misery is aplenty, where the child of God sees the generation of wickedness enjoying itself, and hears their scorning words, "Why do you not come over to us and take part in our enjoyments?" in a world, where the child of God is constantly in danger of being drawn into ruin — ah, what comfort to have the peace of God as a bright blaze warming and cheering our hearts! Ah, what a comfort to have the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, spreading its heavenly wings over you, so that no evil may come nigh unto you! Ah, what a comfort this is to have such peace dropping into your heart like the dew from heaven, keeping you in Christ Jesus! Yea, what a comfort: the God of peace is with you, in your hearts! Then rejoice in Him always, and again I say, Rejoice! for you can exclaim with exulting Paul: "Who shall separate us," etc., Rom. 8, 35—39. May the God of peace be with you all! Amen. F. W. ADAMS, *contr. by O. K.*

Sermon Outlines.

Epistle for Christmas Day.

TIT. 2, 11—14.

In the announcements of the birth of Christ which are recorded in Scripture one feature is made prominent: the new-born child is to be regarded and addressed as Savior, Matt. 1, 21; Luke 1, 31. 46; 2, 11. 30. Where Scripture lays all stress in the record of the nativity, we, too, must place our reverent and grateful emphasis in the publication of that record. No celebration of the birth of the Lord is a correct one that overlooks, or minimizes, or neutralizes, the saving virtue of this event. — The Christmas Epistle expands the term "save." It brings out the immense scope, the vast application of the term. It exhibits

THE CHRIST-CHILD AS THE SAVIOR, THE PERFECT SAVIOR.

1. *He saves from the guilt of sin.* vv. 11. 13 b. 14 a.

a. The birth of Christ is the incarnation of God, 1 Tim. 3, 16, of the Son of God, John 1, 14. Beholding the Christ-child men beheld God, John 14, 9; 1 John 1, 1. No sinner can see God and live, Ex. 33, 20; 1 Tim. 6, 16 ("nor can see"). In His bare majesty

God is, to sinful eyes, a consuming fire. In the infant Jesus, God approaches the sinner in a form such as the sinner can bear to look upon without fear.—The Christ-child is “the great God,” yet a puny, frail human being. He appears “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” Rom. 8, 3. God comes to share our lot as one who wishes to sympathize with, not reprove us for, our misery.—Thus the birth of this Infant is the appearance of the grace of God. Not to mete out justice, but to bring salvation to sinners Christ was sent into the world, John 3, 17. The *fears* of a guilty conscience are allayed by this blessed manifestation of God.

b. But how can this Child “bring salvation”? Answer: 14 a. The birth of Christ is a surrender to the demands of God’s justice. Christ is not only “the great God,” but also a sinless man. This wonderful Being makes Himself a sacrifice for the canceling of the guilt of sin. His birth is the first installment, so to speak, of the price of our redemption. He “gave Himself for us” in His birth-hour, and continued to give Himself to His dying hour. “For us,” *i. e.*, in our place.—Everything in our life and being, on which the curse of God rests, and which causes our hearts to quake when we think of God, “*all iniquity*,” He assumed and, by His sacrifice, removed. Also the possible *doubts* of our heart are dispelled by this manifestation of the grace of God.

c. This grace is universal: it has appeared “unto *all men*,” and it is individual: the Christ-child is “*our Savior*.” From the boundless store of His redemptive work each aching heart may take the needed grace to quiet *his* fears. Also the personal *misgivings* of particular sinners are dissipated by this manifestation of the grace of God. God harbors anger against no one: He has become reconciled by His Son. The Christ-child is a perfect Savior; therefore the angels sing: Luke 2, 14.

2. *He saves from the dominion of sin.* vv. 12. 14 b.

a. The redeeming work of Christ was accomplished *outside of us*. It has removed the ban of God’s anger from us. It has given us a standing in the court of the just God. But sin is *in us*. We are full of ungodliness and worldly lusts. Our reason is perverted: we never frame sober judgments about anything; our will is paralyzed unto all that is good, and active only in the direction of evil; our desires are not towards, but away from, God. Thus we live in this present world slaves of our wicked selves. Sin lords it over us like a merciless tyrant.

b. When Christ gave Himself for us, it was for this purpose also, *viz.*, “that He might purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” His mission was also to break the power of sin in us, to save us from ourselves.

c. How does He discharge this mission? Not like a dreary lecturer on morality, by appealing to us to exert the good qualities

in us; for we have no good qualities to exert; nor like an exacting preceptor who flogs unwilling pupils to the performance of their duty. He does it by the educating power of His grace. The grace which hath appeared, says Paul, *teaches* us two things: self-denial, the mortification of the flesh, separation from the world, and active zeal in all good works. The Christ-child, this Holy Infant, fills those who understand and accept His sacrifice with a perfect hatred of sin, and with a love of purity. The Gospel record of His redeeming work proves in all who receive it a mighty antidote against the craving of sin. And the meek child who grows up into a man, sober, righteous, godly, pure, zealous, furnishes to the believer in His work a stimulating example for his own purifying efforts under grace. Gradually, unremittingly grace breaks the dominion of sin in the heart, forging ahead unerringly to that goal beyond the grave where "the pure in heart" shall see God as He is, Matt. 5, 8; 1 John 3, 2. Also by the sinner's sanctification the Christ-child proves Himself a perfect Savior.

3. *He saves from the punishment of sin.* v. 13.

a. The expression: "He gave Himself for us" refers also to the death of Christ. Hebr. 2, 14 represents death, the ability to die, as the purpose of the incarnation. Death is the wages of sin, Rom. 6, 23. And death awaits also the believer. Is not the salvation of Christ, then, ineffectual after all?

b. No. From out of his mortal body the believer looks to heaven whither the Redeemer has gone to prepare a place for him, and whence He will return to gather "His peculiar people," His believing followers, to Himself. No punishment awaits His redeemed. Their death is no affliction, for it ushers them into life. The hope of heaven lights up the gloom of their dying hour. They are saved also from the terrors of death and hell.

c. The grace that hath appeared fixes human eyes upon that blessed goal. From heaven He came to lead men to heaven. His birth-hour makes our dying hour the birth-hour of eternal life. He was born in order to die; we die in order that we may live, Rom. 6, 23. Thus He saves us from our last enemy and proves Himself the perfect Savior, the Savior to the uttermost, Hebr. 7, 25.

Second Epistle for Third Christmas Day.

1 JOHN 1.

The mystery of the Holy Night, the incarnation of the Son of God, with all the blessed results that flow from this event, the salvation of this world of sinners, have been embodied in one of the names which was bestowed upon our Savior by divine direction. The name Immanuel, which Isaiah (7, 14) gave to the virgin's Son, and by which he forthwith proceeded to address Him (8, 8), is taken

up by the angelic visitor who was sent to quiet the scruples of Joseph regarding his spouse. The angel declares to Joseph the character and the mission of Mary's Child; and Matthew, after recording these facts, introduces the ancient prophecy uttered before King Ahaz, and asserts its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. Jesus is Immanuel. The name Immanuel describes both His person and His work, what He is, and why He is what He is. — The Scripture lesson before us is one of the standard Epistles chosen by the Church for use during the Christmas season. A good opportunity is offered us this year for studying this Epistle, because the Third Christmas Day, now rarely celebrated, falls on a Sunday. This Epistle is virtually a paraphrase on the name Immanuel. We have here

THE APOSTOLIC MESSAGE CONCERNING IMMANUEL.

1. *The strong assertion that a being exists who fully deserves to bear this name.* vv. 1—3.

a. Immanuel is a Hebrew word. It means: God with us. Christ bears this name from the moment that He became man. He existed before He came into the world, 1a, as a living person distinct from, and equal with, the Father, from whom He sprang, as the Word, by an unknown process, 1b. 2a.e, and to whom He holds the relation of son, 3d. With this eternal Word, or Son of God, the apostle identifies Jesus Christ, 3d, *i. e.*, that historic personage whom people living at that time had known by that name. The Word had been "manifested," *i. e.*, the invisible God had appeared to man as a man. God and man had become one person in Jesus Christ; two distinct natures were united in Him, and He was enabled to act both as God would act and as man would act. Surely, such a being deserves to bear the name Immanuel.

b. The union of God and man in the person of Christ was not meant for an idle exhibition to human curiosity of the miraculous power of God; it was for a practical purpose. John declares that he and others have obtained fellowship with the Father and the Son, 3c.d, *viz.*, through this same eternal Word which was manifested to them, 2a.f. The Son of God became man to bring man unto God. Men are dead in trespasses and sins. He was life. Men must die eternally. He was eternal life. The incarnate Son of God taught men to believe in Him as the way unto life everlasting. He caused them to see that He was come to take away their sin, and thus to remove the barrier which separates the sinner from God. He cast in His lot with sinners, to make sinners share His life, here and hereafter. Surely, a being of this kind deserves to be called Immanuel.

c. It is a very strange account which the apostle here offers. But he asserts his indubitable certainty over and over. He is not relating a dream; he is not a visionary. This incarnate God had subjected Himself to the closest scrutiny of men, who had observed Him and pondered His extraordinary being in every possible way and for quite a long time, 1b. c. d. e. 2b. c. 3a.) What the apostle and his associates have said of Immanuel, God-with-us, is the honest

testimony of faithful eye- and ear-witnesses, which they are willing to maintain against every challenger, 2 c. d. 3 a.

2. *The earnest plea to every man to make Christ HIS Immanuel.* vv. 3. 4.

a. Christ entered into cordial relation to the whole world by His incarnation, John 4, 42. As He came for all, He wants all to come to Him. The message which His apostles have to deliver is to the end "that *ye also* may have fellowship." Each person is to claim his share and portion in the great salvation which Immanuel wrought for all. No one is excluded.

b. The original Christmas message was a message of "great joy," Luke 2, 10. Every subsequent message delivered by a Christmas preacher is for the same purpose, v. 4. To be assured of the compassionate interest of God in sinners, of His power and readiness to help the sinner in every need, must cheer the heart amidst the toil and sorrow of this sinful life. The union of the Son of God with our flesh and blood means our union with God, now by faith, hereafter by sight; now as sons, hereafter as heirs.

c. The apostolic message, and every reiteration of it to the end of time, does not only state, but offers, and conveys, and seals these exceedingly great blessings to the hearers. The Word of Immanuel is quick and powerful. It creates faith in its statements. Else John would have "shown" and "declared" and "written" his message in vain, which is impossible, Rom. 1, 16; Luke 2, 19.

3. *The solemn warning not to abuse or set aside the privileges which Immanuel offers.* vv. 5—10.

a. The incarnate Son of God is the best and most perfect gift which has come down from the Father of lights, James 1, 17. The holy Jesus took up His abode amid sinful men. He was the Light of the world, John 8, 5, shining in its fearful darkness. He lighteth up those who receive Him, John 1, 9. His followers walk in His light, and are a light in the Lord, Eph. 5, 8. No hypocrite can boast fellowship with Him. No one can love sin, or maintain his connection with the world, and claim that he is Christ's. Immanuel gave Himself wholly for His people, and only those are His loyal followers who give themselves wholly to Him. To these He makes their fellowship with Him a means of purification. He daily and richly forgives their sins, and renews their lives. But those who "say," but do not prove by their acts, that they are His disciples, are excluded from fellowship with Him, vv. 5—7.

b. John states the reception of Immanuel among His people, John 1, 11. He also indicates the reason, John 9, 40. 41. There are men so conceited as to deny that they are sinners. To these Immanuel has no mission, Matt. 15, 24; John 10, 26; they place themselves beyond the scope of His redeeming work. And if this sad delusion takes hold of one who is a disciple, he likewise loses his fellowship with Immanuel. Immanuel is ever ready to forgive; He is faithful to His promise, and just in meting out the boon of grace, but only to professing sinners. The self-righteous cannot celebrate Christmas. (Hymnbook of Engl. Mo. Synod, No. 38, 1. 10.)